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TRENDS IN NEBRASKA POPULATION, 1870-1980

Several interesting trends emerged from the 1980 Census. One of the topics that received considerable attention in both the popular press and in academic publications was whether a rural renaissance had occurred in America during the 1970s. Six years later, the focus of press interest has shifted to a possible depopulation of rural areas. Have events changed that rapidly, or was there simply a lack of historical perspective in 1980? To provide the perspective, this article reviews population changes and trends in Nebraska counties from 1870 to 1980.

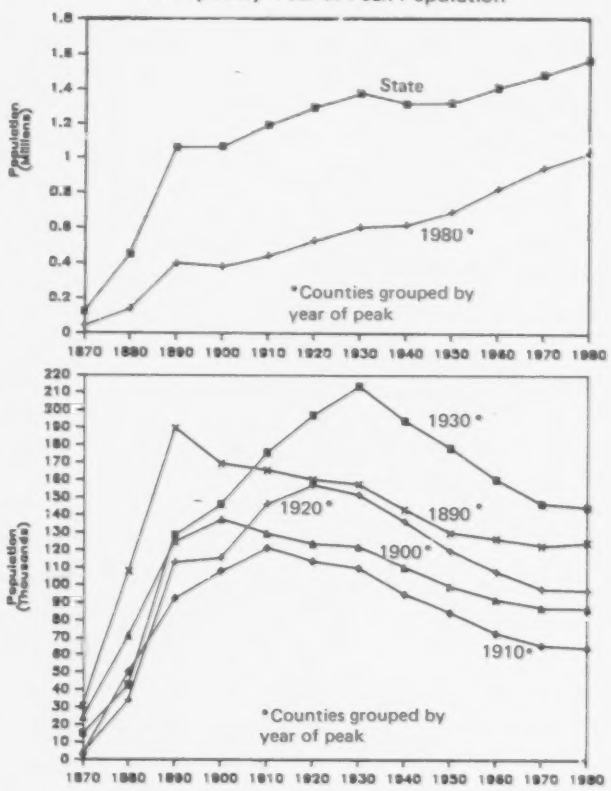
Nebraska's population has grown steadily since statehood, with 1980's population higher than any preceding census. In only one decade (1930-1940) did the state as a whole lose population. At the state level of aggregation, however, conflicting patterns among counties are hidden. For example, it is obvious when looking at license plates that not all counties maintained their relative rankings during the last fifty years. Custer County, for instance, has prefix number 4, but ranked 21st in population in 1980. Sarpy County has number 59, but now is the 3rd largest county in population.

The population of Nebraska counties from 1870 to 1980 can be found in Table 1 on pages 2 and 3. Upon inspection, two distinct patterns of change emerge. One group of counties has grown steadily during the twelve decade period, with the most recent census (1980) representing the highest population. Nearly all of the remaining counties exhibited different behavior. These counties grew rapidly during the first few decades of the period, peaking some time between 1890 and 1930. Since their peaks, these counties, with some recent exceptions, have steadily lost population. Figure 1 contains comparative patterns of growth.

Despite the fact that 80 percent of the state's counties reached their peaks more than a half century ago, Figure 1 illustrates that Nebraska's total population has grown steadily, and its 1980 population was higher than any preceding census. The reason for this, of course, is that the growing counties are among the state's largest. In 1980, they accounted for two-thirds of the state's population, up from one-third at the beginning of the time period.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of counties by census in which they recorded their highest population. Figure 2 also illustrates that only 16 of the state's 93 counties have grown steadily, with 1980 the census with the highest population. Of the remainder, two counties reached their highest populations in 1960, one in 1940, and the remaining 74 counties recorded their highest censuses in 1930 or earlier. The largest number of counties (21) reached their peak in 1930, 18 in 1920, 12 each in 1910 and 1890, and 11 in 1900.

FIGURE 1
Aggregate Population of Counties
Grouped by Year of Peak Population



The sixteen consistently growing counties represent the state's most populous and economically diversified counties. They generally lie along the interstate or Platte River and contain all five of the state's metropolitan counties. In 1980, these counties accounted for 66 percent of the population and only 16 percent of the land area. The two adjacent counties of Kimball and Cheyenne reached their peak population in 1960 during the construction of the Minuteman missile silos. Counties that recorded their highest populations in 1930 were located in the northwest, southwest, and northeast corners of Nebraska. The Sandhills and north central Nebraska began losing population after the 1920 Census. Counties which peaked in 1910, 1900, and 1890 generally were located in the southeast and southern part of the state.

(continued on page 3)

TABLE 1
Population of Nebraska Counties, 1870-1980

	1980	1970	1960	1950	1940	1930	1920	1910	1900	1890	1880**	1870**	1980 as % of Peak Year
Adams	30,656	30,553	28,944	28,855	24,576	26,275	22,621	20,900	18,840	24,303	10,235	19	100.0
Antelope	8,675	9,047	10,176	11,624	13,289	15,206	15,243	14,003	11,344	10,399	3,953	--	56.9
Arthur	513	606	680	803	1,045	1,344	1,412	--	--	91	--	--	36.3
Banner	918	1,034	1,269	1,325	1,403	1,676	1,435	1,444	1,114	2,435	--	--	37.7
Blaine	867	847	1,016	1,203	1,538	1,584	1,778	1,672	603	1,146	--	--	48.8
Boone	7,391	8,190	9,134	10,721	12,127	14,738	14,146	13,145	11,689	8,683	4,170	--	50.1
Box Butte	13,696	10,094	11,688	12,279	10,736	11,861	8,407	6,131	5,572	5,494	--	--	100.0
Boyd	3,331	3,752	4,513	4,911	6,060	7,169	8,243	8,826	7,332	695	--	--	37.7
Brown	4,377	4,021	4,436	5,164	5,962	5,772	6,749	6,083	3,470	4,359	--	--	64.9
Buffalo	34,797	31,222	26,236	25,134	23,655	24,338	23,787	21,907	20,254	22,162	7,531	193	100.0
Burt	8,813	9,247	10,192	11,536	12,546	13,062	12,559	12,726	13,040	11,069	6,937	2,847	67.5
Butler	9,330	9,461	10,312	11,432	13,106	14,410	14,606	15,403	15,703	15,454	9,194	1,290	59.4
Cass	20,297	18,076	17,821	16,361	16,992	17,684	18,029	19,786	21,330	24,080	16,683	8,151	84.3
Cedar	11,375	12,192	13,368	13,843	15,126	16,427	16,225	15,191	12,467	7,028	2,899	1,032	69.2
Chase	4,758	4,129	4,317	5,176	5,310	5,484	4,939	3,613	2,559	4,807	70	--	86.8
Cherry	6,758	6,846	8,218	8,397	9,637	10,898	11,753	10,414	6,541	6,428	--	--	57.5
Cheyenne	10,057	10,778	14,828	12,081	9,505	10,187	8,405	4,551	5,570	5,693	1,558	190	67.8
Clay	8,106	8,266	8,717	8,700	10,445	13,571	14,486	15,729	15,735	16,310	11,294	54	49.7
Colfax	9,890	9,498	9,595	10,010	10,627	11,434	11,624	11,610	11,211	10,453	6,588	1,424	85.1
Cuming	11,664	12,034	12,435	12,994	13,562	14,327	13,769	13,782	14,584	12,265	5,569	2,964	80.0
Custer	13,877	14,092	16,517	19,170	22,591	26,189	26,407	25,668	19,758	21,677	2,211	--	52.6
Dakota	16,573	13,137	12,168	10,401	9,836	9,505	7,694	6,564	6,286	5,386	3,213	2,040	100.0
Dawes	9,609	9,761	9,536	9,708	10,128	11,493	10,160	8,254	6,215	9,722	--	--	83.6
Dawson	22,304	19,771	19,405	19,393	17,890	17,875	16,004	15,961	12,214	10,129	2,909	103	100.0
Deuel	2,462	2,717	3,125	3,330	3,580	3,992	3,282	1,786	2,630	2,893	--	--	61.7
Dixon	7,137	7,453	8,106	9,129	10,413	11,586	11,815	11,477	10,535	8,084	4,177	1,345	60.4
Dodge	35,847	34,782	32,471	26,265	23,799	25,273	23,197	22,145	22,298	19,260	11,263	4,212	100.0
Douglas	397,038	389,455	343,490	281,020	247,562	232,982	204,524	168,546	140,590	158,008	37,645	19,982	100.0
Dundy	2,861	2,926	3,570	4,354	5,122	5,610	4,869	4,098	2,434	4,012	37	--	51.0
Fillmore	7,920	8,137	9,425	9,610	11,417	12,971	13,671	14,674	15,087	16,022	10,204	238	49.4
Franklin	4,377	4,566	5,449	7,096	7,740	9,094	10,067	10,303	9,455	7,693	5,465	26	42.5
Frontier	3,647	3,982	4,311	5,282	6,417	8,114	8,540	8,572	8,781	8,497	934	--	41.5
Furnas	6,486	6,897	7,711	9,385	10,098	12,140	11,657	12,083	12,373	9,840	6,407	--	52.4
Gage	24,456	25,731	26,818	28,052	29,588	30,242	29,721	30,325	30,051	36,344	13,164	3,359	67.3
Garden	2,802	2,929	3,472	4,114	4,680	5,099	4,572	3,538	--	--	--	--	55.0
Garfield	2,363	2,411	2,699	2,912	3,444	3,207	3,496	3,417	2,127	1,659	--	--	67.6
Gosper	2,140	2,178	2,489	2,734	3,687	4,287	4,669	4,933	5,301	4,816	1,673	--	40.4
Grant	877	1,019	1,009	1,057	1,327	1,427	1,486	1,097	763	458	--	484	59.0
Greeley	3,462	4,000	4,595	5,575	6,845	8,442	8,685	8,047	5,691	4,869	1,461	--	39.9
Hall	47,690	42,851	35,757	32,186	27,523	27,117	23,720	20,361	17,206	16,513	8,572	1,057	100.0
Hamilton	9,301	8,867	8,714	8,778	9,982	12,159	13,237	13,459	13,330	14,096	8,267	130	66.0
Harlan	4,292	4,357	5,081	7,189	7,130	8,957	9,220	9,578	9,370	8,158	6,086	--	44.8
Hayes	1,356	1,530	1,919	2,404	2,958	3,603	3,327	3,011	2,708	3,953	119	--	34.3
Hitchcock	4,079	4,051	4,829	5,867	6,404	7,269	6,045	5,415	4,409	5,799	1,012	--	56.1
Holt	13,552	12,933	13,722	14,859	16,552	16,509	17,151	15,545	12,224	13,672	3,287	--	79.0
Hooker	990	939	1,130	1,061	1,253	1,180	1,378	981	432	426	--	--	71.8
Howard	6,773	6,807	6,541	7,226	8,422	10,020	10,739	10,783	10,343	9,430	4,391	--	62.8
Jefferson	9,817	10,436	11,620	13,623	15,532	16,409	16,140	16,852	15,196	14,850	8,096	2,440	58.3
Johnson	5,285	5,743	6,281	7,251	8,662	9,157	8,940	10,187	11,197	10,333	7,595	3,429	47.2
Kearney	7,053	6,707	6,580	6,409	6,854	8,094	8,583	9,106	9,866	9,061	4,072	58	71.5
Keith	9,364	8,487	7,958	7,449	8,333	6,721	5,294	3,692	1,951	2,556	194	--	100.0
Keya Paha	1,301	1,340	1,672	2,160	3,235	3,203	3,594	3,452	3,076	3,920	--	--	33.2
Kimball	4,882	6,009	7,975	4,283	3,913	4,675	4,498	1,942	758	959	--	--	61.2
Knox	11,457	11,723	13,300	14,820	16,478	19,110	18,894	18,358	14,343	8,552	3,666	261	60.0
Lancaster	192,884	167,972	155,272	119,742	100,585	100,324	85,902	73,793	64,835	76,395	28,090	7,074	100.0
Lincoln	36,455	29,538	28,491	27,380	25,425	25,627	23,420	15,684	11,416	10,441	3,632	17	100.0

TABLE 1 (continued)
Population of Nebraska Counties, 1870-1980

	1980	1970	1960	1950	1940	1930	1920	1910	1900	1890	1880**	1870**	1980 as % of Peak Year
Logan	983	991	1,108	1,357	1,742	2,014	1,596	1,521	960	1,378	--	--	48.8
Loup	859	854	1,097	1,348	1,777	1,818	1,946	2,188	1,305	1,662	--	--	39.3
McPherson	593	623	735	825	1,175	1,358	1,692	2,470	517	401	--	--	24.0
Madison	31,382	27,402	25,145	24,338	24,269	26,037	22,511	19,101	16,976	13,669	5,589	1,133	100.0
Merrick	8,945	8,751	8,363	8,812	9,354	10,619	10,763	10,379	9,255	8,758	5,341	557	83.1
Morrill	6,085	5,813	7,057	8,263	9,436	9,950	9,151	4,584	--	--	--	--	61.2
Nance	4,740	5,142	5,635	6,512	7,653	8,718	8,712	8,926	8,222	5,773	1,212	44	53.1
Nemaha	8,367	8,976	9,099	10,973	12,781	12,356	12,547	13,095	14,952	12,930	10,451	7,593	56.0
Nuckolls	6,726	7,404	8,217	9,609	10,446	12,629	13,236	13,019	12,414	11,417	4,235	8	50.8
Otoe	15,183	15,576	16,503	17,056	18,994	19,901	19,494	19,323	22,288	25,403	15,727	12,345	59.8
Pawnee	3,937	4,473	5,356	6,744	8,514	9,423	9,578	10,582	11,770	10,340	6,920	4,171	33.4
Perkins	3,637	3,423	4,189	4,809	5,197	5,834	3,967	2,570	1,702	4,364	--	--	62.3
Phelps	9,769	9,553	9,800	9,048	8,452	9,261	9,900	10,451	10,772	9,869	2,447	--	90.7
Pierce	8,481	8,493	8,722	9,405	10,211	11,080	10,681	10,122	8,445	4,864	1,202	152	76.5
Platte	28,852	26,544	23,992	19,910	20,191	21,181	19,464	19,006	17,747	15,437	9,511	1,899	100.0
Polk	6,320	6,468	7,210	8,044	8,748	10,092	10,714	10,521	10,542	10,817	6,846	136	58.4
Red Willow	12,615	12,191	12,940	12,977	11,951	13,859	11,434	11,056	9,604	8,837	3,044	--	91.0
Richardson	11,315	12,277	13,903	16,886	19,178	19,826	18,968	17,448	19,614	17,574	15,031	9,780	57.1
Rock	2,383	2,231	2,554	3,026	3,977	3,366	3,703	3,627	2,809	3,083	--	--	59.9
Saline	13,131	12,809	12,542	14,046	15,010	16,356	16,514	17,866	18,252	20,097	14,491	3,106	65.3
Sarpy	86,015	66,200	31,281	15,693	10,835	10,402	9,370	9,274	9,080	6,875	4,481	2,913	100.0
Saunders	18,716	17,018	17,270	16,923	17,892	20,167	20,589	21,179	22,085	21,577	15,810	4,547	84.7
Scotts Bluff	38,344	36,432	33,809	33,939	33,917	28,644	20,710	8,355	2,552	1,888	--	--	100.0
Seward	15,789	14,460	13,581	13,155	14,167	15,938	15,867	15,895	15,690	16,140	11,147	2,953	97.8
Sheridan	7,544	7,285	9,049	9,539	9,869	10,793	9,625	7,328	6,033	8,687	--	--	69.9
Sherman	4,226	4,725	5,382	6,421	7,764	9,122	8,877	8,278	6,550	6,399	2,061	--	46.3
Sioux	1,845	2,034	2,575	3,124	4,001	4,667	4,528	5,599	2,055	2,452	699	--	33.0
Stanton	6,549	5,758	5,783	6,387	6,887	7,809	7,756	7,542	6,959	4,619	1,813	636	83.9
Thayer	7,582	7,779	9,118	10,563	12,262	13,684	13,976	14,775	14,325	12,738	6,113	--	51.3
Thomas	973	954	1,078	1,206	1,553	1,510	1,773	1,191	628	517	--	--	54.9
Thurston	7,186	6,942	7,237	8,590	10,243	10,462	9,589	8,704	6,517	3,176	109	31	68.7
Valley	5,633	5,783	6,590	7,252	8,163	9,533	9,823	9,480	7,339	7,092	2,324	--	57.3
Washington	15,508	13,310	12,103	11,511	11,578	12,095	12,180	12,738	13,086	11,869	8,631	4,452	100.0
Wayne	9,858	10,400	9,959	10,129	9,880	10,566	9,725	10,397	9,862	6,169	813	182	93.3
Webster	4,858	5,396	6,224	7,395	8,071	10,210	10,922	12,008	11,619	11,210	7,104	16	40.5
Wheeler	1,060	1,051	1,297	1,526	2,170	2,335	2,531	2,292	1,362	1,683	644	--	41.9
York	14,798	13,685	13,724	14,340	14,874	17,239	17,146	18,721	18,205	17,279	11,170	604	79.0
State Total*	1,569,825	1,485,333	1,411,330	1,325,510	1,315,834	1,377,963	1,296,372	1,192,214	1,066,300	1,058,910	452,402	122,993	100.0

* The state total is less than the sum of the counties due to rounding.
** The state total is more than the sum of the counties because several areas never had a legal existence and were dropped or reorganized in subsequent years.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Census*, 1980-Volume 1, Chapter A-Nebraska (Number of Inhabitants) and similar publications for preceding years.

(continued from page 1)

Figure 3 maps the distribution of counties by the percentage of their 1980 population to their highest population. From this map, it can be seen that the 16 counties with highest population in 1980 obviously were 100 percent of the 1980 Census. For 15 of the remaining counties, the 1980 Census was 75 to 99.9 percent of their highest census; it was 50 to 74.9 percent for 40 counties; and for 22 counties, their population in 1980 was less than 50 percent of their highest census.

From Figure 3, it can be seen that the counties that were in the 75 to 99.9 percent range almost always were adjacent to one or more of the steadily growing counties. Most of the counties in this group also grew between 1970 and 1980. The counties at the other end of the scale, those falling below 50 percent, were scattered throughout the state, although most were located in the Sandhills area or southern third of the state.

Many reasons can be hypothesized for the disparity of trends in Nebraska's county populations. For those counties that peaked between 1890 and 1930, part of the reason for their early decline was that their initial growth was too rapid and could not be supported by the existing economic (agricultural) base. In addi-

(continued on page 6)

Review and Outlook

A large decline in real output for the agriculture component of the Nebraska economy precipitated a drop for October 1985 in the Bureau of Business Research's physical volume index. On a monthly basis, total economic activity declined 1.9 percent during October, the fourth monthly loss in 1985. Agriculture output fell 11.9 percent, while nonagriculture activity inched forward a meager 0.3 percent.

The nonfarm component of the state economy fared somewhat better than the ag sector. The level of manufacturing activity declined two consecutive months; October 1985 ouput fell 0.9 percent, following a 1.2 percent decrease during September. October construction output grew 0.6 percent after a string of four consecutive monthly losses. Output for the distributive sector rose 0.5 percent in October, while the government component registered a monthly increase in economic activity of 1.1 percent.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, Nebraska cash farm marketings declined $42 million during October 1985. State cash receipts, however, were up $227 million from October 1984 marketings, an increase of 50 percent. Nebraska's index of agriculture prices received rose 4.7 percent from the previous month, but registered a loss of 8.4 percent from the October 1984 index level. During October, the U.S. index of farm prices received was up 1.8 percent; it has dropped 11.2 percent since October 1984.

(continued on page 5)

Notes for Tables 1 and 2: (1) The "distributive" indicator represents a composite of wholesale and retail trade; transportation, communication and utilities; finance, insurance, and real estate; and selected services. (2) The "physical volume" indicator and its components represent the dollar volume indicator and its components adjusted for price changes using appropriate price indexes--see Table 5, page 5.

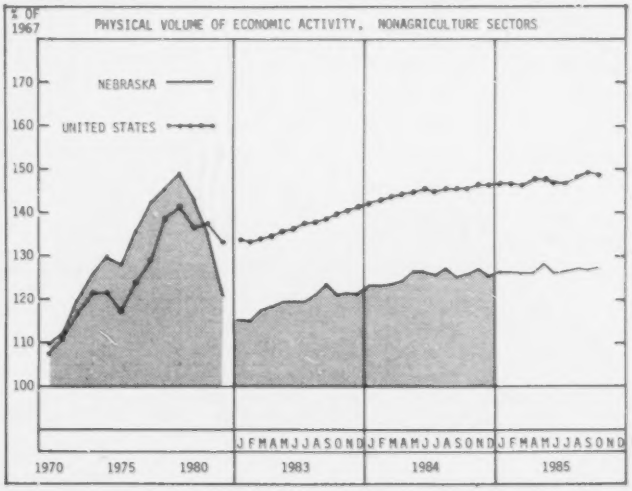
ECONOMIC INDICATORS: NEBRASKA AND UNITED STATES

1. CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR

October 1985	Current Month as Percent of Same Month Previous Year		1985 to date as percent of 1984 to date	
Indicator	Nebraska	U.S.	Nebraska	U.S.
Dollar Volume	109.5	105.3	105.2	105.7
Agricultural	161.5	104.2	107.3	99.3
Nonagricultural	104.6	105.3	104.9	105.8
Construction	95.4	109.3	94.4	109.6
Manufacturing	98.6	98.6	99.9	100.2
Distributive	105.9	107.1	105.5	107.4
Government	110.2	107.0	112.8	106.8
Physical Volume	109.0	102.6	104.3	102.8
Agricultural	176.4	117.3	121.2	111.2
Nonagricultural	101.6	102.2	101.5	102.6
Construction	93.5	107.2	91.8	106.6
Manufacturing	98.9	98.1	100.3	99.8
Distributive	102.6	103.7	101.9	103.7
Government	103.5	102.0	104.5	101.8

2. October 1985 CHANGE FROM 1967

Indicator	Percent of 1967 Average	
	Nebraska	U.S.
Dollar Volume	382.9	451.0
Agricultural	368.4	353.8
Nonagricultural	384.9	454.2
Construction	275.5	463.1
Manufacturing	360.3	319.2
Distributive	394.9	525.8
Government	439.3	465.6
Physical Volume	132.0	148.3
Agricultural	161.6	153.8
Nonagricultural	127.4	148.1
Construction	77.2	129.7
Manufacturing	145.4	125.0
Distributive	121.3	161.5
Government	155.4	152.8

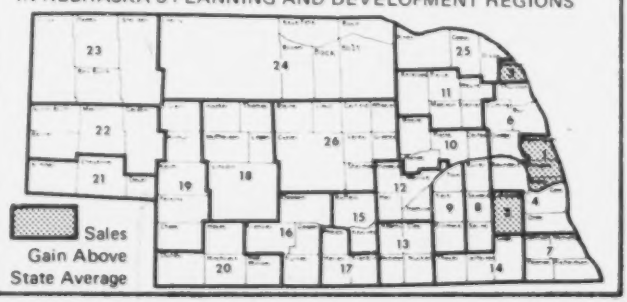


3. NET TAXABLE RETAIL SALES OF NEBRASKA REGIONS AND CITIES

Region Number[1] and City	City Sales[2]	Sales in Region[2]	
	Oct. 1985 as percent of Oct. 1984	Oct. 1985 as percent of Oct. 1984	1985 to date as percent of 1984 to date
The State	100.9	100.7	99.7
1 Omaha	106.2	106.3	105.4
Bellevue	95.8		
Blair	119.4		
2 Lincoln	102.0	102.7	103.7
3 So. Sioux City	103.8	96.8	100.2
4 Nebraska City	98.5	96.6	96.3
6 Fremont	103.4	93.4	95.2
West Point	95.8		
7 Falls City	98.7	98.3	95.2
8 Seward	105.5	101.9	93.5
9 York	99.6	96.2	93.7
10 Columbus	70.7	78.0	90.9
11 Norfolk	90.6	93.4	93.8
Wayne	87.5		
12 Grand Island	90.9	91.0	94.4
13 Hastings	83.3	86.3	91.3
14 Beatrice	112.9	108.0	96.1
Fairbury	113.4		
15 Kearney	96.0	95.6	93.4
16 Lexington	92.2	87.2	90.4
17 Holdrege	87.8	89.3	88.3
18 North Platte	102.3	98.0	92.3
19 Ogallala	117.6	108.1	92.1
20 McCook	96.4	92.3	94.5
21 Sidney	106.3	101.4	98.2
Kimball	98.2		
22 Scottsbluff/Gering	105.4	105.2	99.0
23 Alliance	99.9	99.1	97.7
Chadron	103.7		
24 O'Neill	90.1	95.9	91.7
25 Hartington	87.4	99.3	91.6
26 Broken Bow	97.7	93.1	92.0

[1]See region map below.
[2]Sales on which sales taxes are collected by retailers located in the state. Region totals include motor vehicle sales; city totals exclude motor vehicle sales.
Compiled from data provided by Nebraska Department of Revenue.

1985 YEAR TO DATE AS PERCENT OF 1984 YEAR TO DATE IN NEBRASKA'S PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGIONS



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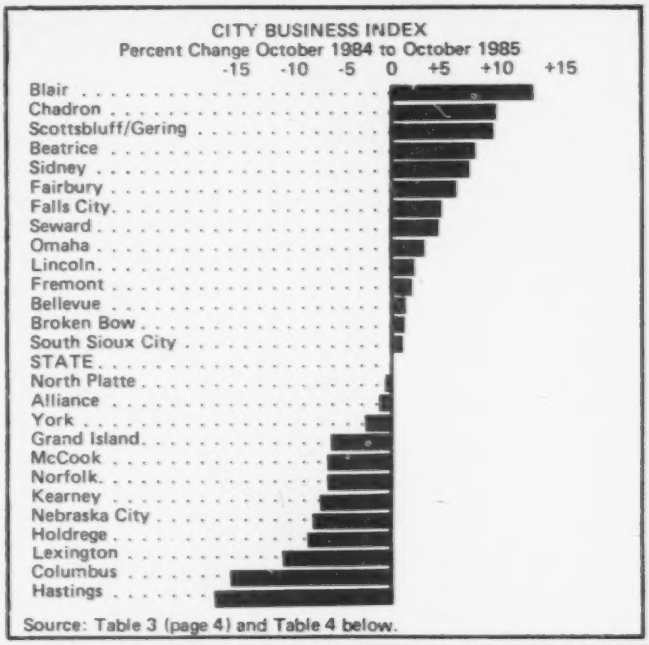
Nebraska total dollar volume retail sales increased 0.7 percent during October 1985 compared to October 1984 sales. The gain in total retail sales was due primarily to a 0.9 percent rise in unadjusted nonvehicle sales. When adjusted for price changes, however, total nonvehicle retail sales slumped 0.8 percent during October. During September 1985, motor vehicle sales increased 21.7 percent from the sales level of September 1984. In a quick reversal, dollar volume motor vehicle sales fell 0.5 percent in October. The September weakness in state retail sales improved in October, with thirteen of the cities listed in Table 3 registering sales above the level of October 1984.

Fourteen of the twenty-six cities listed recorded positive changes in the business activity index from year earlier levels. There was no change statewide in the level of business activity, an actual improvement since this index value has been negative for several months. Spurred by a 19 percent growth in retail sales, Blair led the city gainers with a 12.5 percent increase in business activity. Chadron and Scottsbluff/Gering experienced jumps of 9.4 percent and 9.1 percent. Beatrice, Sidney, Fairbury, Falls City, and Seward registered gains in business activity of 4.0 to 8.0 percent. Nebraska's metro areas recorded smaller increases in business activity; Omaha reported a 2.7 percent rise, followed by Lincoln with a 1.7 percent increase, and South Sioux City with a 0.7 percent jump. Other cities with October gains in business activity were Fremont, Broken Bow, and Bellevue.

For two months, the Nebraska composite index of leading economic indicators has increased; the index gained 0.9 percent during November 1985. The total magnitude of the October and November increases in the leading index exceeds 1.0 percent, a larger upswing than has occurred since the end of 1983. Four of the five component indicators registered improvements on a seasonally adjusted basis, leading to the November increase in the composite index. Construction activity was down in November, but not enough to have a significant impact on the index value. The magnitude of the October and November increases in the leading index signals the likelihood of an upturn in economic activity around midyear 1986. The coincident index shows the Nebraska economy to be in a holding pattern. State economic activity peaked the first quarter of 1985 and remained virtually flat during the remainder of the year. Significant increases in November and December unemployment suggest the state economy will move downward or at best remain flat until around the middle of 1986. The current downturn or plateau began early in 1985, but is not deep enough to be classified as a recession.

CHARLES L. BARE



Source: Table 3 (page 4) and Table 4 below.

4. October 1985 — CITY BUSINESS INDICATORS

The State and Its Trading Centers	Percent of Same Month a Year Ago: Employment[1]	Building Activity[2]	Power Consumption[3]
The State	100.1	107.6	103.5
Alliance	98.6	94.5	107.4
Beatrice	99.9	168.2	101.1
Bellevue	100.8	196.2	111.2
Blair	100.8	250.9	104.0*
Broken Bow	101.0	155.8	97.1
Chadron	97.9	704.6	130.0
Columbus	96.7	89.9	104.4
Fairbury	100.5	111.7	108.1
Falls City	101.1	294.9	103.4
Fremont	101.2	105.7	101.2*
Grand Island	100.0	70.7	105.2
Hastings	100.1	15.4	113.9
Holdrege	101.1	56.9	113.7
Kearney	99.7	37.1	102.1
Lexington	99.3	27.1	98.8
Lincoln	99.9	139.7	105.8
McCook	100.0	41.9	104.1
Nebraska City	100.2	24.9	103.4
Norfolk	99.9	71.4	91.0
North Platte	100.2	89.6	111.3
Omaha	100.8	109.5	103.3
Scottsbluff/Gering	100.7	446.2	92.7
Seward	100.5	162.9	100.5*
Sidney	99.9	277.2	122.9
So. Sioux City	99.6	99.8	113.6
York	99.8	64.7	96.4

[1] As a proxy for city employment, total employment for the county in which a city is located is used.
[2] Building Activity is the value of building permits issued as spread over an appropriate time period of construction. The U.S. Department of Commerce Composite Construction Cost Index is used to adjust construction activity for price changes.
[3] Power Consumption is a combined index of consumption of electricity and natural gas except in cases marked * for which only one is used.

Source: Compilation by Bureau of Business Research from reports of private and public agencies.

5. PRICE INDEXES

October 1985	Index (1967 = 100)	Percent of Same Month Last Year	Year to Date as Percent of Same Period Last Year*
Consumer Prices	325.5	103.2	103.5
Commodity component	287.9	101.7	102.1
Wholesale Prices	308.0	99.5	99.4
Agricultural Prices			
United States	230.0	88.8	89.4
Nebraska	228.0	91.6	89.2

*Using arithmetic average of monthly indexes.
Sources: Consumer and Wholesale Prices: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Agricultural Prices: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

FIGURE 2
Year of Highest Census

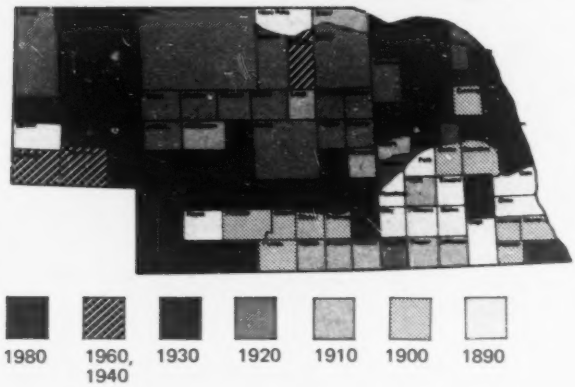
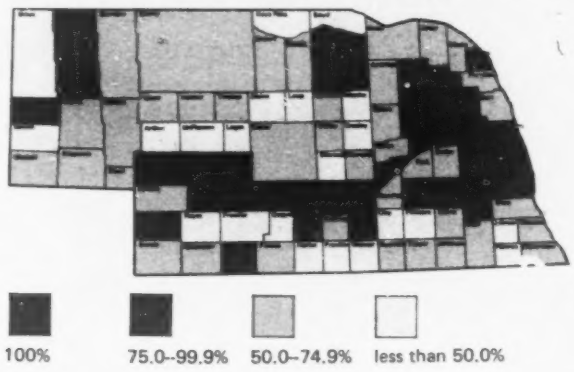


FIGURE 3
1980 Census as a Percent of Highest Census



(continued from page 3)

tion, many of these counties were along routes for other Western development and some of their population may have been temporarily located in the area while waiting to move further west. These counties also lost considerable population during the 1930s. Another reason for their continued decline (as a group) is their relatively high reliance on agriculture. As agriculture changes, with fewer farms and fewer farmers, economic opportunities lie outside the area. Transportation also has been a factor, as most of the counties with below peak populations lie outside of the state's major transportation routes, either railroads or highways.

Although the reasons for their decline may be speculative, the results of declining populations are more obvious. For many of Nebraska's counties, especially those with 1980 populations 75 percent or less than their highest census, the age structure has been altered dramatically. Decade after decade, these counties have lost young people through outmigration. As a result, the resident population is older, with median ages in the high 30s and 40s, and 20 percent or more of the population older than 65. This has led to fewer births, declining school enrollments, and, in some instances, a natural decline in population (that is, more deaths than births in a year). In addition to an older population, other effects of a decline include aging and vacant housing units.

The economic structure of these counties also has changed. With an older population, less income is earned from current labor and more comes from transfer payments such as social security and from interest, dividends, and rents. In fact, social security income is larger than net farm income in many Nebraska counties.

In summary, most Nebraska counties have faced decades of population loss with adverse demographic and economic consequences. The continued loss of population during the 1980s and 1990s may have more severe results because the population and economic bases have diminished over the decades. As a result, the viability of small communities in these counties is questionable.

Currently, considerable attention in the state is focused on economic diversification and economic development. Given the above, it appears that without change, the prospect for a sizable number of Nebraska counties is continued loss of population. Even if a turnaround occurs, however, it is highly unlikely that the majority of Nebraska counties will be able to surpass their populations of a half century ago.

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